

Nuke site gives insight into Holloman’s past

by **Airman 1st Class
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At “ground zero” today, one can only sense the stillness and tranquility of the barren Oscura desert basin. All that remains are the remnants of steel support beams, melted away by a blast more than half a century ago. Yet, in the wake of the millionth-of-a-second detonation is an important chapter in Holloman’s past.

The world entered the atomic age at 5:29:45 a.m., July 16, 1945 with the detonation of the first nuclear device - Fat Man - at the White Sands Missile Range’s Trinity Bomb Site. The historic moment required support from all over the country, some of which came from the Alamogordo Army Air Field. First Lt. Otto Mueller, officer-of-the-day during that fateful morning, wrote years later about his experiences.

“This entire event was a well-kept secret,” he wrote. “We had civilian-type personnel constantly flowing through the base. For all we knew, these were just Boeing and Pratt and Whitney technicians for the P-47 Thunderbolts here flying cover over the range.”

Lieutenant Mueller went on to write about important personnel from the east coast who arrived on base April 15th.

“I was assigned as the OD for the day,” he wrote. “It was noon when I traveled to the flightline to meet VIPs coming in, including Maj. Gen. Leslie Groves, the Manhattan Project commander; Vannevar Bush, chairman of the National Defense Research Committee; and the wartime head of the Office of Scientific Research and Development, James Conant. I hadn’t the slightest clue why they were here, but I attended to their needs and continued on with my shift.”

That night, Lieutenant Mueller retired to the field’s guard shack. After slipping off his boots and falling fast asleep, he was awoken hours later by a hysterical sergeant.

“Around 5:30 a.m., the sergeant-of-the-guard dashed into my bunk telling me something had just blown up in the desert,” Lieutenant Mueller wrote. “I immediately contacted base headquarters and informed them of the situation. I was told from the get-go that an ammunition dump on base exploded and that was all I needed to know. I later found out this was the cover-up story used to ensure the secrecy of the event.”

At the same time, Billie Brown, a Red Cross worker on base, awoke to a frantic phone call from her brother-in-law Forest

Bellows who was a logging truck driver returning from a sawmill in Cloudcroft. He tried to describe what he thought was “the end of the world.”

“He thought it really was coming to an end,” Mrs. Brown said. “He was so overwhelmed by the sight of it.”

As Mrs. Brown prepared herself for work that morning, she couldn’t shake the idea of the climatic explosion near Alamogordo. An hour and a half later, the field director of the base Red Cross office picked up her and her colleagues to carpool to the base. During their ride, Mrs. Brown told the story to her friends.

Because they had all slept through the blast, Mrs. Brown said she could tell none of them believed her story.

“When I got into the car, I told the group about the phone call I received earlier that morning,” Mrs. Brown said. “I don’t think any of them believed me. Later when the truth was released after the second bombing of Japan and the radiated animals started showing up at the local zoo, they were awed by the idea of the bomb being tested here.”

The war in the Pacific ended with the dropping of Little Boy, the second of the atomic bombs dropped on Japan. With the war over and Alamogordo Army Air Field’s B-29 Stratofortress personnel returning from combat, Lieutenant Mueller wrote of an ironic twist to the entire incident.

“Due to the cover-up story on the bomb given to me, I was given orders stating “no information to be given out,” he wrote. “I placed one word in my OD guard report under the column of unusual happenings – nothing.”



Two metal studs protruding from elements of Trinitite, the element left from the fusing of metal and the desert basin, are all that remains of the 100-foot tower that harbored the bomb before the test.



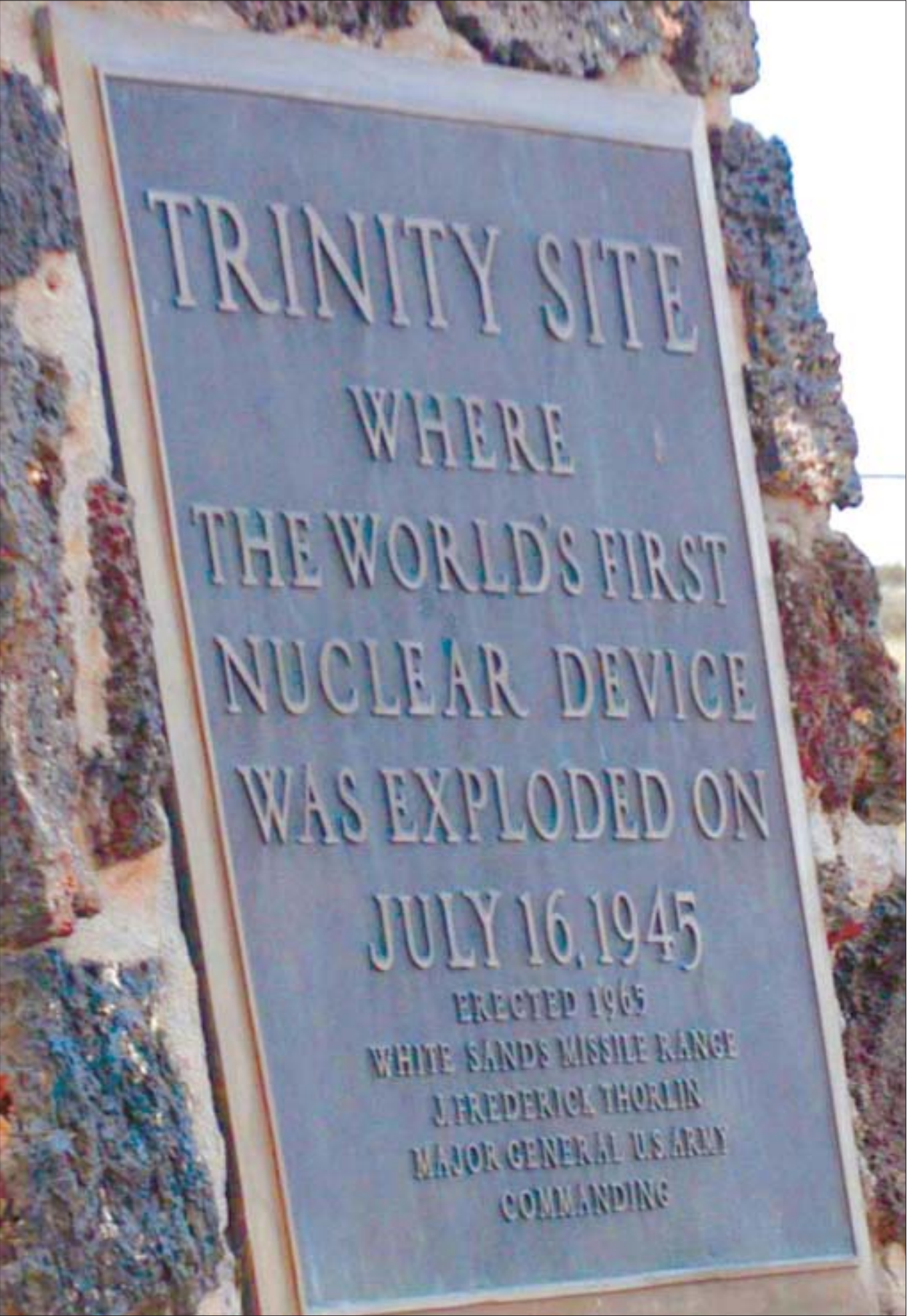
A "Caution: Radioactive Materials" sign at the Trinity Site is a constant reminder to visitors of what took place 59 years ago. Radioactivity at the site remains at safe levels and has been found to be less than the exposure recieved from the sun.



This replica of the original "Fat Man" bomb casing is on display 30 feet from ground zero. The Fat Man bomb design was used at the Trinity Site. A smaller version of Fat Man, nick-named "Little Boy," was used over Nagasaki, Japan on August 9, 1945.



The McDonald Ranch house was the site for the assembly of the bomb's core. Inside the house, the master bedroom was turned into a clean room to protect the core, tools and equipment from the New Mexico dust.



This symbolic plaque, placed on an obelisk constructed on the exact ground zero site, was officially mounted in 1965 to commemorate Trinity Site, the world’s first nuclear device ever detonated.

Photos by Airman 1st Class Stephen Collier